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ABSTRACT

A summary of legislation concerning educational accountability reveals that 13 States hope to find greater accountability in testing or assessment programs, 7 in planning, programming, budgeting systems, 4 in uniform accounting system, 8 in the evaluation of professional employees, 2 in management information systems, and 1 in performance contracting. The framework of educational accountability also includes goals, educational vouchers, program audits, citizen involvement and related concepts. One problem in accountability is that there are apparently wide differences between citizens' expectations of public education and those of educators. Accountability is frequently being redefined with an emphais on outcomes using cost-effectiveness techniques; it should be understood that educators can be held accountable only within the constraints of the financial resources allocated to them. The most popular legislative means to accountability, statewide assessment programs, is often objected to on the grounds that abuses in the use of test data outweigh the benefits likely to be obtained from the data. The shortcomings and bias of norm-referenced tests, the use of random sampling, and pressures on all concerned are some of the objections to State assessment. Proponents of this method believe it will increase commitment to education. Efforts are being made to encourage the use of experimental programs and to improve statistical methods of handling data. (KM)

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STATE ASSESSMENT (ACCOUNTABILITY): POTENTIAL FOR BECOMING A FRIEND OR FOE?

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Accountability has been described as an idea whose time has come again or whose time is always (Lennon, 1971). The Webster's New International Dictionary defines accountable as being answerable or being capable of explanation. I believe that it is often the method by which accountability is to be attained rather than its purpose that prevents us from reaching a professional consensus on its meaning. Accountability is not viewed by all persons as being a many splendored thing. Some have likened it to a state of educational fascism (NEA, Education Daily, January 10, 1973). Others have suggested that it is a means of making the schools accountable or determining what any given increment of instruction will produce. Twenty-three states have enacted legislation which provides one means of defining educational accountability.

Legislative enactments of the various states have been summarized by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for the federally financed Cooperative Accountability Project (CAP, Legislation by the States, 1972). This review indicates that thirteen states hope to find greater accountability in state testing or assessment programs; seven in planning, programming, budgeting systems; four in uniform accounting systems; eight in the evaluation

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A speech delivered at the 78th Annual Meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, March 27, 1973, Chicago, Illinois.

of professional employees; two in management information systems; and one in performance contracting (see Appendix A). Legislation also frequently pertains to the development and evaluation of educational performance in relation to state or school district educational goals. The interest in goals is attested to by the fact that approximately thirty-five states have developed or otherwise acquired educational goals (CAP, Education in Focus, 1972).

While it would seem that much of the public and political interest in educational accountability is serious, there is little agreement as to the processes by which it will or should be attained. The public's preoccupation with educational assessment and educational efficiency and effectiveness is exacerbated by high costs and the rhetoric of its critics. Educational accountability, as now defined in the legislation, may be considered to be in a state of continuing development (CAP, Legislation by the States, 1972). In addition to the areas already mentioned, educational accountability falls within a broad framework which includes concepts such as performance contracting, educational vouchers, educational program audits, information systems, citizen interaction and involvement strategies, management by objectives, and other related scientific management technologies.

The Intent and Purpose

Legislation enacted thus far frequently emphasizes goals and objectives which provide clues in regard to the public's expectations for accountability. Examples of such expectations are:

- To evaluate the adequacy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the public schools.

- To prepare and submit an annual report and recommendations to the legislature, governor, state board, and local school districts.
- To establish a uniform system of evaluating and assessing the performance of professional employees.
- To define and measure educational quality in the state.
- To expand the life options and opportunities for students.
- To determine the relative value of school programs as compared to their cost.
- To provide information to help school districts increase their efficiency in using available financial resources.
- To evaluate experimental, innovative, and special programs.
- To gain greater public confidence in the schools.
- To establish a financial planning, management, and control system.
- To provide information to allocate state funds and professional services in a manner calculated to equalize educational opportunities.
- To improve competence in basic skills.
- To develop a system of educational self renewal.
- To determine the degree of achievement of the pupils in the schools.
- To assess and evaluate for purposes of school accreditation.

While no consistent intent seems to be present in legislative enactments, the preceding goals make it possible to synthesize something of a consensus as follows:

- To evaluate the adequacy, efficiency, and effectiveness of educational programs, especially those involving the basic cognitive subject content areas.
- To provide information on student performance to governors, legislatures, state and school boards, and the public at large in order that they may compare the performance of one district to another or ascertain the level of actual performance to expected performance.

- To provide information in respect to the allocation of resources and for educational decision making.
- To determine the effectiveness of professional employees in attaining educational goals and objectives.
- To establish a uniform program and budgeting system to compare programs, performance, and costs and to inform the public.

During the 1960's, criticism of the alleged failures of school systems developed pressures for legislated changes. Public citizens, as the consumers of government services, became increasingly skeptical of privileged sanctuaries who seemingly withheld information or denied them participation in educational decision making (Gallagher, 1970). It became a popular cry to demand that educators adopt changes and create alternatives to conventional practice in order to improve productivity and effectiveness. Prescriptive legislation, educational responsibilities shared with other agencies, performance contracting, educational alternatives, evaluation systems, educational audits, and the old and new scientific management technologies became a popular advocacy to meet demands for greater accountability from school officials.

Today, additional research and experience have been obtained in regard to experimentation with alternatives to traditional roles and practices in education. Some (Page, 1972) have come to the conclusion that there has been abundant change, but not much progress (Messick, 1971, p. 78), or much hope (Jencks, 1972, p. 13). A critical rethinking of many of the current educational issues is needed which may lead us to firmer philosophical grounds about the role of education and schools in a complex contemporary American society.

Educational Accountability

The consensus of hopes and aspirations of a people largely determines what the central role, purposes, and aims of public education will be. To the degree that the schools fulfill the public's expectations and trust,

they are likely to be allocated the public confidence and resources needed to fulfill their mission. Often, wide differences appear to separate citizens' expectations from those of educators. An example of such a difference can be demonstrated by the findings of the Fourth Annual Gallup Poll (1972). The latest poll shows that the public believes that the goals of the schools should be:

- To prepare students to get better jobs (44%).
- To help them get along better with people at all levels of society (43%).
- To enable them to make more money (38%).
- To help them attain self satisfaction (21%).
- To stimulate their minds (15%).
- For miscellaneous reasons not mentioned (11%).

The Gallup Poll goals are likely to be in sharp contrast with those stated by most educators, which would be likely to include such areas as competence in language and computational skills, creative and critical thinking, human relations, self actualization, and lifelong learning. If differences relating to educational goals for elementary and secondary education between the public and educators are as diverse as seems to be implied, then other differences on fundamental issues such as individual rights vs. responsibilities, the individual vs. society, freedom vs. discipline and authority, traditional vs. counter culture, and egalitarianism vs. libertarianism may be even more sharply drawn. Along with concerns about productivity, taxes, and costs, we must also examine whether the lack of confidence in the schools is the symptom of deeper social changes and the school system's seeming insensitivity to these changes.

More and more frequently, educational accountability is being redefined with an emphasis on outcomes using cost/effectiveness technologies. Many still find it easy to accept the notion that the schools should be held accountable for results rather than only for the expenditure of the resources provided to them. However, such a simplified point of view does not take into account the reality that learning is cumulative and is affected by complex influences within and without the school system. Teachers cannot be held individually accountable for learning outcomes or performance levels when constraints are imposed which preclude attainment of those outcomes. School administrators cannot be held accountable for the adequacy of the financial resources which may be limited by the taxpayers of the community. Therefore, in contrast to the proposition that the schools must be held accountable, a greater acceptance must be gained of the notion that all parties involved in the educative processes, from citizens to students, must share in the responsibility for educational accountability. If greater agreement on the purposes of educational accountability is not attained, the schools are likely to be in even more trouble than they are now.

State Assessment

By far the most popular legislative means to attain educational accountability are state testing or assessment programs. Thirteen states require some form of testing or assessment. They are: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Ten of these states specifically mention assessment of the basic skills of reading, language, and mathematics in the elementary grades, and this is one of the more frequently mentioned concerns of the public. Smith's (1972) recent appeal for national performance

standards can be cited as another example of this interest in basic educational skills. Only a half dozen states specify testing or evaluation in areas such as intelligence, vocational education, t educationally disadvantaged, the handicapped, and experimental and innovative programs. Another half dozen states specify the inclusion of non-achievement variables which may be related to student performance, and another three or four states specify eval ion systems to ascertain reasons for differentials in performance.

Approximately one-third of the states expect that some kind of a system will be developed which will ultimately relate the performance of students to measurable goals and objectives, which would then be able to provide some basis for determining how well expectations are being met, what kind of changes in pupil performance have taken place, and what kind of progress has occurred. Generally, state testing programs either specify or imply uniformity in administering these programs in order to achieve comparability of results so that school districts may be statistically compared with each other.

Planning, Programming, Budgeting Systems

The second area of accountability in state legislative enactments is the use of planning, programming, budgeting systems (PPBS). Seven states--Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio--have adopted PPBS legislation. Four other states--Arizona, Nebraska, New Mexico and Rhode Island--have uniform accounting mandates which could easily lead to more refined systems of PPBS. The primary purpose of PPBS is to be able to relate costs to programs in order to make decisions about educational priorities, the allocation of resources, and relating local programs and objectives to state programs.

Several of the state enactments for PPBS explicitly seek to link programs, costs, and pupil achievement. The longer budgeting time frame provides that public policy and decisions can be formulated and made on the basis of three, five, seven, or even ten year periods in order to be better able to anticipate future needs for resources. Frequently, such time frames include the specification of performance objectives to be reached and require the preparation of reports to explain discrepancies between anticipated and actual performance. At least one state provides a ten percent state aid penalty for not participating in state adopted PPB systems. To some degree, perhaps, it can be inferred that legislators have stronger feelings for accountability in respect to budgeting than they do for assessing educational outcomes or processes.

It must be acknowledged that PPB systems do not exclude components for evaluation and assessment; rather, they are an integral part of the system. PPBS, like any other systems methodology, should be considered a comprehensive system for multiple levels of decision making. Ultimately, the system analyzes alternatives on the basis of costs and benefits in order to select alternatives which provide for the best mix of benefits at least cost.

Evaluation of Professional Staff

The third major kind of legislated educational accountability is the evaluation of professional personnel. Eight states--California, Connecticut, Florida, New Jersey, Oregon, South Dakota, Virginia, and Washington--now have or are proposing such systems. In addition, several states are reportedly moving toward competency-based certification which assumedly will certify professionals on the basis of skills rather than educational training and experience.

The goals for the evaluation of professional personnel appear to be to establish a mandatory uniform system, establish written guidelines to evaluate staff, and involve professionals in the design and operation of evaluation systems. In a sense, it can be seen as the establishment of due process procedures which could relate to the nonrenewal of contracts and dismissal of teachers.

Without much question, the evaluation of professional employees is the most sensitive area of educational accountability enacted by state legislatures. Some persons would be very interested in linking educator performance variables to pupil achievement and to costs for use in the renewal of licenses or providing economic and professional rewards and punishments. Proponents of professional evaluation are not impressed with arguments that learning is complex and cumulative and that credit or blame cannot be easily attributed to one teacher or groups of teachers. On the other hand, professional groups are equally determined that teacher performance will not be related to pupil achievement. Increasingly, the conditions under which professionals will be evaluated will be specified in negotiated employee contracts at the local level, not state.

Program Evaluation

A trend to go beyond the measurement of current status is apparent in some of the recent legislation which provides for more comprehensive systems of program evaluation. Evaluation infers that relationships between input, process, and outcome and level of effectiveness can be ascertained. Such information would enable managers to fine tune the decision making processes in such a way as to maximize the attainment of program objectives by selecting the most effective and economical mix of costs and benefits. Thus, by

designing evaluation components into educational strategies, information can be obtained which not only gives an indication of status but also is able to monitor relationships between performance and influencing factors.

It now appears that for many states the question is more what kind of a state assessment or accountability plan shall be adopted rather than whether there should be an assessment plan. The prevailing legislative sentiment appears to be as Senator Clarence Blount (1972, App. F) from Maryland recently stated before a group of state educational agency personnel: "Accountability is here. Controlling it is your responsibility as well as your opportunity. I urge you, seize the initiative and shape your laws and procedures to establish the programs which the professional educator, at any rate, must carry out." Using this as a basic assumption that the pressures for state assessment are here to stay, the remainder of this paper will examine what may be alleged to be weaknesses and strengths of state educational assessment programs.

Objections to State Assessment

Opponents to plans for state educational assessment often point out that abuses in the use of test data on pupils, schools, and school districts outweigh the benefits that are likely to be obtained from such information. Much of the early opposition to national assessment pertains to state assessment as well. Hand (1965, p. 8) stated the objections as:

- It would set up obstacles to the realization of equal educational opportunity.
- It would set the stage for a centrally controlled curriculum.
- It would stifle local innovation and experimentation.
- It would result in unbearable pressures on teachers and administrators.
- It would encourage cheating on the part of students and teacher alike to perform well on tests.

Others point out that the use of traditional norm-referenced test data, while providing information to teachers on an individual's performance in relation to group performance, does not provide an adequate basis to give a valid index of classroom, school, or district effectiveness in attaining educational goals and objectives. The point is made that unless the population and educational objectives of the sample on which the test is normed are similar to those of a district being tested, the results are open to serious question. Attention is often called to the fact that such measures have only limited use in diagnosing the performance of individual students as well.

The shortcomings of traditional instruments to measure pupil achievement have led to the development of criterion-referenced instruments to measure minimum or acceptable levels of student and school performance. It should be pointed out that the development of measurable performance objectives, criterion-referenced instruments, and analyses of interacting variables are still very much in the developmental stages. Complete reliance on this technology to measure school effectiveness in relation to educational goals is likely to be a bit premature since unproven assessment systems might lead to faulty conclusions about cause/effect or input/output relationships. Persons who are impatient with the slow development of assessment will be tempted to want to adopt input/output methods and analyses from the industrial sector which rely on products which are manufactured to precise standards. Reliance on such methods in the social sciences is equally hazardous.

The development of early state assessment plans found eager advocates to link educational effectiveness or productivity to the performance of teachers and administrators. Others sought to prove that more dollars

expended do not produce better educational products in order to justify actions to reduce financial support and to eliminate the so-called educational frills in the curriculum. Such motives and pressures, if allowed to influence the plan for state assessment, are likely to set up conflict situations which would retard the development and adoption of more appropriate plans and instruments in the future. Still others indicate that assessment programs should be carried out at the school district level where objectives, performance norms, and performance expectations relate appropriately to the school and community. This caution frequently stems from fears of abuses of data to be collected on pupils and schools.

The cost of carrying out state assessment programs for all students in a given grade or subject will often lead to the use of random sampling techniques which will provide only a broad brush collection of data to give an index or indicator of probability levels of performance of the total group. The cost of data collection will probably preclude annual measurements on all of the critical variables. Opponents emphasize that the limited information obtained at such high cost does not provide a reasonable cost/benefit ratio. The pressure to reduce costs of state assessment programs in order to obtain some measure of performance leads to the likelihood of several mistakes. Henry Dyer (1970) characterized them as (1) judgments based on less than two measures with sufficient time intervals between them under well defined surrounding conditions, (2) treating pupil I.Q.'s as an input measure which is used as a determinant of output or performance, and (3) selecting some sample populations to be assessed with selected groups of schools but not others which may lead to faulty conclusions. Therefore, at best, low cost state assessment programs are likely to have little appeal to school districts unless pupil performance variables are measured across all districts and all pupils which will permit use of the data by school districts as well as for state analyses.

Some persons argue that questionable data and faulty conclusions could lead to a delay in the early return of public confidence in the schools and that this would fuel new pressures to seek educational alternatives under the assumption that anything that is new or different is bound to be better. Experimentation with alternatives to existing practices without an adequate evaluation has less hope for increasing effectiveness than do more traditional methods which have survived the test of time and practice. However, it should be noted that some educators are beginning to accept some limited experimentalism in regard to state and local assessment if safeguards are provided to prevent comparisons of information on individual pupils, teachers, classrooms, and schools.

Arguments for State Assessment

In spite of many objections, state assessment programs have continued to increase since Tyler's early advocacy for national assessment (1966). Proponents of state assessment believe that it will add to the citizens' knowledge and understanding (Michigan State Board, 1970, p. 1), increase the public's interest in the schools, and contribute to a renewed financial and social commitment to education, which will provide for the continued educational well-being of children.

Much of the rhetoric of early assessment has now been papered over with that of educational accountability and more complex systems technology utilizing input/output and cost/benefit analyses. This has encouraged the adoption and use of goals and measurable objectives which, also at a minimum, specify who is accountable, for what results, with what processes, and under what conditions. Today there is also likely to be room under the umbrella of accountability for the schools' primary critics which may have decreased its popularity with them!

Some of the fears in respect to reporting results to the public also appear to have been unfounded. Some states, notably Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan and California, have carried out assessment programs for several years and, although not without voiced objections today, find that results can be reported to the public without much of the reactive emotionalism noted during earlier periods (Kearney, 1970). A wider understanding of the limitations of traditional achievement tests and the interpretation of their result has improved the public's ability to interpret such information. National assessment now appears to be generating the kind of further inquiry needed to seek greater improvement of instruction. For example, recently the Education Commission of the States reported that legislators, state school officials, and professional educators are beginning to ask questions relating to the classroom and curriculum implications of national assessment data. A panel of high level scientists will evaluate national assessment science data, and the Council of Great City Schools has indicated that it will examine implications for large urban districts as well as related research needs specified by the Council (ECS, 1972).

State assessment now appears to be developing a climate which will encourage the use of experimental programs to improve instruction. Some states are providing special programs to raise student achievement, especially reading performance, and intervention strategies in early childhood education to overcome handicaps which have tended to contribute to poor academic performance. Educational experimentalism, along with adequate research and evaluation capability, which has been long overdue, can be used to discover ways and means to improve instruction and curriculum in elementary and secondary education.

It is, perhaps, a hopeful sign that the rhetoric of assessment is more frequently beginning to turn toward the concepts of evaluation rather than just assessing the status or performance on any given subject or content area. Evaluation is a far more comprehensive concept which may be able to relate inputs to outcomes and process variables in order to find the best mix of inputs, methods, and outcomes to achieve desired goals. Almost anything which takes much of the subjectivity from our notions of what is effective may increase the probability that schools will enhance the ability to meet the future educational needs of children.

There are strong indications that better statistical methods of handling assessment data will be able to resolve dilemmas related to the development of national, state, and local norms, comparing one pupil's performance with another, one grade or classroom to another, and school-to-school comparisons. The use of the school district and, perhaps, the identification of socio-economic subpopulations would enable comparison of pupil performance of groups to ascertain whether levels of pupil performance are characteristic of certain kinds of broad categories of school, community, or socioeconomic variables or influences. Additional research on the influence of non-educational variables would provide additional insights into analytic methods which would help us understand and interpret differences in pupil performance.

The increasing tendency to develop state assessment models that are based on state goals and measurable performance objectives provides another means of finding out how well students are attaining the educational expectations of school districts, communities, and the state. Assessment plans which are based on goals and objectives also have the potential to bring educators and citizens together to reexamine the goals that have been established for

the schools as well as to examine the changes in order to improve on past performance. Thus, state assessment can serve as a basis for developing improved communications between the school staffs and citizens of each community and lead to a better consensus on what the schools should do and how well students should perform. Guttentag (1970, p. 42) emphasizes that accountability for programs must go in two directions--to the taxpayers and consumers of programs--and that the more accountable the programs are to them, the greater the likelihood that they will succeed.

Comprehensive plans for state assessment would also provide a means by which local school districts could develop their own assessment and accountability programs. It would then be their decision where they would interface with explicated state goals and objectives. Thus, the selection and use of variables and areas where local school districts will evaluate school and pupil performance will be the decision of the school district, not the state. Local assessment plans must be considered as a necessary outgrowth of state assessment, and together they should be considered the elements of an adequate statewide assessment program. Local school district assessment plans would always be able to act as a check and balance on the results and conclusions of state assessment.

State assessment will have to develop the capability and logistics to carry out such programs. This capability, both human and technical, can be made available to local school districts for the development of their own programs. Beyond assessment, to that of educational evaluation, this technical assistance can become the outreach for judging program effectiveness and discovering ways to improve education. Thus, ultimately the results of improved evaluation of educational programs and effectiveness would find their way into the school classrooms of the state and provide better education to students.

The influence of state assessment programs on local operations is likely to stimulate changes in educational decision making which will lean toward greater objectivity and rationality. Such a trend, along with a broader involvement in decision making, has great potential helping to forge an educational consensus on the role of the school and the kinds of educational opportunities that are provided to students. Objective information will help the general public interpret what and how well the schools are doing. This will provide for a more appropriate response to allegations of failure levied against the schools by their critics. This may result in a recapture of public confidence and modify some of the concern that the public has about educational costs (Foster, 1938, p. 43) and quiet some elements of the so-called taxpayer revolt. The restoration of public confidence in the schools must be considered one of the important short range imperatives of our time.

Conclusions

As must be obvious, there does not appear to be any basis of finding easy answers to whether state assessment has more potential for being a friend or a foe. Those who fear state assessment are likely to concur that the present situation is like finding ourselves in a caboose of a speeding train, looking backwards, racing down a track being switched to unknown destinations by demons (Lapp, 1972, p. 15). At the controls is human intelligence; and it, in the last analysis, is responsible for the eventual success or failure of state assessment.

The sensitivity to educational costs, effectiveness, and productivity appears to have set in motion complex forces which will affect the way we finance and govern public education. Alternatives to traditional practices are being sought under the assumption that what exists is inadequate.

Schools will be a part of the cutting edge of social change; consequently, they will continue to be embroiled in controversy and conflict. The proposition can be raised as to whether these changes are really signs of ideological and philosophical change rather than solely of the sensitivity to costs, effectiveness, and productivity which is characteristic of much of the public's debate about the present state of educational effectiveness.

It can be pointed out that education, like business and industry, has long been subject to the public's accountability expectations. However, it does appear to be something of a paradox when the public will insist on the recall and repair of defective manufactured products and be willing to pay the costs and at the same time be so unconcerned about the fact that twenty-five percent of our students do not graduate from high schools and some that graduate are deficient in skills and competencies.

Perhaps state and local school district assessment and accountability programs can help find answers to the fundamental issues that have been raised. There does seem to be hope that state assessment can provide us with some important spin-offs in our quest for greater educational accountability. This all appears to be moving us in the direction that Barro suggested (1970, p. 205) when he predicted that the byproducts of state and local assessment programs may make the effort worthwhile.

APPENDIX A

THE SHAPE OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY LEGISLATION

State	PPBS	MIS	Uniform Accounting	Testing	Evaluation of Professional Employees	Performance Contracting
Alaska	X					
Arizona			X	X		
California	X			X	X	X
Colorado	X			X		
Connecticut				X	X	
Florida				X	X	
Hawaii	X					
Illinois	X					
Indiana	X					
Maryland				X		
Massachusetts				X		
Michigan				X		
Nebraska		X	X	X		
New Jersey					X	
New Mexico			X			
Ohio	X					
Oregon					X	
Pennsylvania				X		
Rhode Island		X	X	X		
South Dakota					X	
Virginia				X	X	
Washington					X	
Wisconsin				X		

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